

111TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 161

Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives regarding the need for free, democratic, transparent, and fair elections in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela without threats or intimidation.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 11, 2009

Mr. MACK submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives regarding the need for free, democratic, transparent, and fair elections in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela without threats or intimidation.

Whereas the Venezuelan Constitution provides that the President of Venezuela is limited to two six-year terms;

Whereas subsequent to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez's election in 2006, he immediately called for an end to presidential term limits so that he could run again;

Whereas Chávez has repeatedly undertaken efforts to extend his rule by overturning term limits;

Whereas, on December 2, 2007, the Government of Venezuela held a constitutional referendum on repealing

presidential term limits and suspending certain constitutional rights;

Whereas the 2007 referendum backed by Chávez was definitively defeated by the people of Venezuela;

Whereas Chávez chose to ignore the mandate of the Venezuelan people and instituted many of the provisions defeated in the 2007 referendum via presidential decree;

Whereas Venezuela's November 2008 municipal elections were preceded by several measures by Chávez to thwart the opposition, such as attacks on property rights, threats against the media and the freedom of the press, and threats to strip future funding if opposition gubernatorial candidates were elected;

Whereas Chávez fulfilled these threats when opposition leader, Antonio Ledezma, won the Caracas mayorship by revoking Ledezma's authority over the 8,000-member police force, Caracas' 18-hospital health system, and 1,200 sports and recreation facilities;

Whereas, in November 2008, Chávez once again proposed a constitutional amendment that removes presidential term limits, thereby allowing him to rule Venezuela until at least 2019;

Whereas the constitutional referendum will be held on February 15, 2009;

Whereas Chávez has increased his rhetoric against university students who have organized protests ahead of the February referendum and has used the threat of "civil war" if he loses the vote;

Whereas the United States is committed to promoting freedom, security, prosperity, democracy, and the rule of law;

Whereas the Charter of the Organization of American States, of which the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is a member state, stipulates that “[t]he peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it”;

Whereas democracy requires a system of political parties and organizations, the separation of powers, the independence of the branches of government, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, a free and independent press, and the guarantee of periodic, free, and fair elections;

Whereas Venezuela was once a thriving democracy with a vibrant free market system;

Whereas under Chávez, the Venezuelan economy has experienced substantial problems and currently has the highest inflation in Latin America and is experiencing shortages of basic food staples;

Whereas in the years since Chávez first took office, he has taken deliberate steps to eliminate freedoms and launch his “Bolivarian Revolution”;

Whereas Chávez continues to pursue close ties with state sponsors of terrorism and international terrorist groups;

Whereas international human rights organizations have consistently condemned Chávez’s efforts to weaken democratic institutions and human rights guarantees in Venezuela;

Whereas Chávez unilaterally increased the size of the Venezuelan Supreme Court and appointed numerous pro-Chavez judges in clear contravention of the principles of democracy and separation of powers; and

Whereas Chávez has packed the National Election Council with pro-Chávez directors who are not able to guarantee a fair and transparent vote: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) calls for free and fair elections in the
3 Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, conducted in ac-
4 cordance with the standards of responsible nations
5 and free from interference, threats, and intimidat-
6 tion;

7 (2) supports the efforts of the people of Ven-
8 ezuela and its democratic civil society to create the
9 necessary conditions for free and fair elections;

10 (3) strongly condemns the recent actions of
11 Hugo Chávez as detrimental to democracy and a vio-
12 lation of the Charter of the Organization of Amer-
13 ican States;

14 (4) affirms its strong opposition to all political
15 elements that continue to subvert democracy in Ven-
16 ezuela; and

17 (5) urges the Secretary of State to use all
18 means at the disposal of the United States to pro-
19 mote free, democratic, transparent, and fair elec-
20 tions in Venezuela.

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